

Islam is a Peaceful Religion

A LECTURE BY HADRAT MIRZA MASROOR AHMAD, KHALIFATUL MASIH V, SUPREME HEAD OF THE WORLDWIDE AHMADIYYA MUSLIM COMMUNITY DELIVERED AT THE UNIVERSITE D'ABOMEY-CALAVI COTONOU, BENIN, DURING HIS RECENT MOST SUCCESSFUL VISIT IN GHANA, BURKINO FASO, BENIN AND NIGERIA.

*Dear students and staff members at this university,
Assalamu alaikum warahmatullah.*

I have been asked to shed some light on Islam as a peaceful religion. In view of the shortage of time, I can only address this subject briefly.

Whenever one wishes to speak about Islam as a religion of peace, the question naturally springs to mind that whereas there are so many religions in the world such as Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc., when it comes to finding out whether Islam is a religion of peace, why should Islam be the odd one out?

One reason for this is that a few years after the beginning of Islam, anti-Islamic powers began a propaganda that Islam is a religion of extremism and violence and wants to compel others into belief by means of the sword. This, of course, is incorrect. In the beginning, the Muslims of Makkah suffered persecution but they remained silent. Finally, they migrated to Madinah but there too the disbelievers hounded the Muslims and forced upon them a battle to which I will revert later. The proof against those opponents who allege that Islam was spread by the sword is that although the disbelievers of Makkah raised all sorts of objections, yet history stands witness to the fact that the people of Makkah themselves never complained that the Muslims had used the sword against the disbelievers to compel them to change their faith.

Secondly, what has given Islam a bad name is an ugly and awful image of extremism presented, whether knowingly or unwittingly, by some Muslim groups and



The Founder of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (the Promised Messiah and Mahdi) had a keen interest in religion from a very early age. Over time his knowledge and understanding of religion and its application to society deepened.

Being a Muslim it was his firm belief that all religions were true and he always sought to uphold the dignity of religion and to demonstrate its relevance to everyone.

His mission was to revitalise the truth that all religions held within them and to revive the teachings of Islam. It was through this that he would bring mankind together and establish everlasting peace.

Hadhrat Ahmad^(as) had established himself as a respected writer and had written over 80 books. One of his greatest scholarly works was *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*, prepared as a paper and read out at the Conference of Great Religions in 1896. He also wrote a fascinating treatise in 1899 entitled *Jesus in India*, a book that uncovered remarkable evidence of Jesus'^(as) journey to India.

People joining his community reflected his success in conveying the truth of Islam. From 1889 until the time of his demise in 1908 tens of thousands of people accepted him. This blessing has continued and will continue through his Khalifas (successors).

organisations, and these groups unfortunately had personal vested interests.

In order to see a religion's beauties or its defects, justice requires that you should make its teachings or its holy scripture the anvil by which to judge it, otherwise everyone would accuse every other faith willy-nilly. For instance, the teaching of Christianity, according to the Holy Bible, is:

'But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.'

(Matthew: 5:39)

But, in Bosnia or Iraq or other countries, America and the other Western powers, resorted or are resorting to aggression. If, however, we say that the Christian teaching is that if anyone raises his head against you, you should use all your might to trample it to death, this would be a grave injustice. In the same way, to find out the true teachings of Islam, we would have to study the Holy Qur'an and see what it says and not base it on the actions of some Muslims who have forgotten the teachings of the Holy Qur'an.

The stand of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community is that the teaching of the Holy Qur'an promotes peace. We have to take this message to every corner of the world. Therefore, I shall begin my message today by reference to the Holy Qur'an. After that we shall examine the practice of the Holy Prophet Muhammad^(sa) to whom the teachings of the Holy Qur'an were revealed. Did he ever support any kind of cruelty, violence or extremist terrorism? Then, based on the Holy Qur'an and the Traditions of the Holy Prophet^(sa), some important clarification has been provided to us by the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian^(as), who claimed that he was the Promised Messiah, and I shall refer to some of his writings.

Anyhow, let us first see what the Holy Qur'an commands us to do in order to establish peace. God Almighty says in the Holy Qur'an:

Whosoever killed a person – unless it be for killing a person or for creating disorder in the land – it shall be as if he had killed all mankind.

(Al Maidah, Ch.5: v. 33)

Explaining this verse, the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community says:

'A person who kills a person unfairly or who kills someone who had neither rebelled, nor became a source of violating peace amongst the people nor created disorder in the land, it is as if he has killed the whole of mankind. In other words to kill a person without any cause is, according to God Almighty, like the murder of the entire human race. It is obvious from this verse, how big a sin it is to take the life of another person without reason.'

(*Lecture Chashma-e-Ma'rifat* pp 23-24: *Commentary by the Promised Messiah* Vol.2: p.405)

Thus, this is the beautiful teaching of Islam that the unlawful killing or the shedding of innocent blood of someone is like the killing of the entire human race, that is to say, the taking of a single life is like the massacre of thousands of innocent lives. Now, everyone can very well imagine what kind of sentence would be passed on someone who is found guilty of the taking of thousands of innocent lives. So this is the beautiful teaching given to us by God Almighty in the Holy Qur'an. Whosoever acts against this, acts against the teachings of Islam.

Then, the Holy Founder of the Ahmadiyya community takes us further than this because it was after his true reflection and deliberation and his understanding of Islamic teachings that God Almighty provided him with the guidance. Commenting on this verse, he adds:



Hadrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad – Khalifatul Masih V, Head of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim community.

Hadrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad is the great grandson of the Promised Messiah (peace be upon him). In 1977, he devoted his life for Islam and went to Ghana where he held various posts including manager of the Ahmadiyya Agricultural Farm where he successfully planted and nurtured wheat for the first time in that country.

In 1985, he returned to Pakistan and held various senior positions in the areas of financial affairs, Director of Education, Principal Director and the Executive head. In addition, he has held many other high-level positions within the community.

On 22nd April, 2003, his election as Khalifatul Masih V (Fifth Successor to the Promised Messiah (peace be upon him) was announced.

The worldwide Ahmadiyya Community look to their spiritual leader for guidance and leadership in matters of faith. Since the community was established over a hundred years ago, it has established itself as a community of law-abiding citizens who help all communities in various activities and has truly made its mark as one that promotes the true teachings of Islam as a religion of peace.

Islam is saying that even if you are unkind in your treatment with your fellow human being, you are a cause of destroying the peace and harmony of the world. Forget killing anyone, you should always be kind in your dealings with every person in the world and spread the peaceful message of Islam.

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‘He who abandons kindness abandons religion. The Holy Qur'an teaches that whosoever kills a person without justifiable cause will be as if he has killed the whole world. In the same way, I say that if someone is not kind unto his brother, it is like he has been unkind to the whole world.’

(*Al Hakm Vol. 9 No.15 dated 30 April 1905 p.2: Commentary by the Promised Messiah, Vol.2: p.405*)

Now on this verse, the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community has drawn an interesting conclusion that people think that Islam is an extremist religion but this is a mis-understanding on their part. Islam is saying that even if you are unkind in your treatment with your fellow human being, you are a cause of destroying the peace and harmony of the world. Forget killing anyone, you should always be kind in your dealings with every person in the world and spread the peaceful message of Islam.

I shall briefly explain some of the countless examples of kindness we find in the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad^(sa) and how concerned he was about the condition of his people.

If someone is kind to some person and wants to see his or her betterment, then the person will try his best to do something for him or her. The Holy Prophet^(sa) was so kind and anxious for his people and prayed for them even though they believed in so many gods that it is beyond our imagination. God Almighty has promised that He would most surely punish those who associate others with God. Now, this thought that God Almighty would never forgive one who associates partners with God, used to make the Holy Prophet^(sa) restless so much so that he would bow down repeatedly in prayers. He had a burning passion in his heart for the reformation of his people that he had become weary with worry for his people. Finally, God Almighty had to tell him not to grieve himself to death for sorrow after them (Ch.18:v.7) and that his mission was only to give them the message. We can judge his prayers from the following Tradition:

The Holy Prophet^(sa) prayed for his enemies:

‘O Allah! Guide my people because they know not (*do not know the truth*)’.

In the same way, when once he was asked to pray that a curse befalls the Dossan tribe, he prayed instead:

'O Allah! Guide the tribe of Dossan.'

So this was the anxiety in him for kindness and for humanity. He never said that he was going to compel them into belief by use of the sword but in fact refrained from any malediction or uttering any curse that an evil befalls his enemy.

'The pagans of Makkah exiled the Holy Prophet^(sa) from Makkah and gave him no respite in Madinah but whenever he met them, the Holy Prophet^(sa) dealt with gracious kindness towards them. After the migration of the Holy Prophet^(sa) to Madinah, the people of Makkah had to suffer a severe drought so much so that they had to live on dead meat and bones. Then in utter helplessness, Abu Sufyan, the leader of the Makkans, had to approach the Holy Prophet Muhammad^(sa) and said: "O Muhammad! You command treating one's own relatives well. Your people are dying. Pray to your God in our favour (that this famine passes away) and it begins to rain lest your people perish."

To bring Abu Sufyan down to earth, the Holy Prophet^(sa) remarked that you are very brave and courageous that despite the transgression by the Makkans, you demand a prayer on their behalf. But the Holy Prophet^(sa) did not refuse to pray because he was mercy personified and he could have never wished that his people should perish. Then the people observed that his hands went up in prayers immediately and the Holy Prophet's prayers for an end to the famine and the heavens to open up was duly accepted. It rained so much that the days of ease and abundance returned for the Quraish of Makkah. But, at the same time, their denial and opposition grew rapidly.'

(Bukhari: *Kitabul Tafseer Sura Al-Rum lidukhan*)

Now after this who can say that he gave a teaching of extremism and terrorism.

'He who abandons kindness abandons religion. The Holy Qur'an teaches that whosoever kills a person without justifiable cause will be as if he has killed the whole world. In the same way, I say that if someone is not kind unto his brother, it is like he has been unkind to the whole world.'

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THERE IS NO COMPULSION OF FAITH IN ISLAM

Then the Holy Qur'an states:

There should be no compulsion in religion. Surely, right has become distinct from wrong; so whosoever refuses to be led by those who transgress, and believes in Allah, has surely grasped a strong handle which knows no breaking. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

(Ch.2:V.257)

Its explanation and practical application can be seen from this Tradition when the Banu Nadir were exiled from Madinah when they failed to fulfil their promise to maintain peace. At that time they also had many children of the Ansar (Muslim inhabitants of Madinah). These children had begun to live amongst the Jews, because in the pre-Islamic days of ignorance, amongst the Arab tribes of Aus and Khizraj, those who had no male children used to pledge that if the next child were born a male they would make him a Jew. Thus, there were many boys from the Aus and Khizraj tribes who had been handed over to Jewish families. When the Jews of Banu Nadir were exiled because of their transgression, the Muslims wanted to get back their own descendants from the Jews. The Holy Prophet of Islam^(sa) refrained them from their action on the very basis that '*there is no compulsion in religion*' that once you hand over your own son to someone else and that someone else makes your descendant a follower of Judaism, you cannot take him back: he would have to go with the Banu Nadir.

Then there is the account of a slave of Hadrat Umar^(ra) who narrates that although he was a slave of Hadrat Umar^(ra), Hadrat Umar^(ra) never forced him to become a Muslim. Hadrat Umar^(ra) most certainly used to explain to him with love and affection to become a Muslim but the slave would refuse and Hadrat Umar^(ra) would only say: There is no compulsion in faith and fell silent after that. Finally, before his death, he set this slave free. Now who can, therefore, say that there is any room for compulsion or causing a breach of peace in Islam?

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The Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, the Promised Messiah^(as) says:

'I know not wherewith our opponents or from whom they have heard that Islam was spread by the sword. God says in the Holy Qur'an that there is no compulsion in the Islamic faith. Then who gave the order of force? What were the weapons of that force? And what kind of sincerity and belief is it of those compelled to become Muslims that without being paid and despite being a mere two to three hundred men, they should confront a force of thousands? Then, when they should have grown into thousands, they should defeat several hundred thousands, and, in order to save their faith from the enemy, they should offer their heads like sacrificial lambs and should seal the truth of their faith with their own blood. And they should be so passionate for spreading the Oneness of God that like refugees, they should endure such hardship and reach the desert of Africa and spread Islam on that continent; and should bear such difficulties and reach China not in the form of invaders but as refugees and should call the people of China to Islam. Say honestly, is this the work of those who were forced to become Muslims? Those whose hearts disbelieve, can their tongues believe? No, but this is the work of those whose hearts are filled with the light of faith and in whose hearts there is none but God and God.'

(*Paigham Sulh: Ruhani Khazain*, Vol.23, pp.468-469)

FREEDOM OF FAITH AND CONSCIENCE

Amongst the very many traditions about the teaching of Islam on the freedom of faith and conscience, perhaps just one account is enough after which there is no need of further clarification.

'Despite becoming the subjects of the Holy Prophet^(sa), some groups of opponents wanted to hang on to their own faith. The question came to their mind as to what would happen to them because they knew that the Holy Prophet^(sa) required that every man had the right to believe in any faith. These opponents had not accepted this demand but in the past had used force against the Muslims. When the opponents had been defeated, the Holy Prophet^(sa), decided to remove their

Each one of you is free in matters of faith. You are our Zimmi (a non-Muslim living in a Muslim country). God and His Messenger shall be fully responsible for your safety.' (The Holy Prophet^(sa))

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humiliation and addressing them suggested: "The principle for whose acceptance I fought against you, will not be abandoned because of your opposition to it. Undoubtedly, because of your cruel mentality, you adopted a wrong course of action, but rights shall be preserved. Go, no blame attaches on you. Each one of you is free in matters of faith. You are our

Zimmi (a non-Muslim living in a Muslim country). God and His Messenger shall be fully responsible for your safety.'

[*Nisb al Raiah fi Takhrij Ahadith Al Hadaya* Vol. 4, p.381 published Egypt]

Then Allah says:

O ye who believe! be steadfast in the cause of Allah, bearing witness in equity; and let not a people's enmity incite you to act otherwise than with justice. Be always just, that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah. Surely, Allah is aware of what you do.

(Sura Al-Mai'dah – Ch.5:V.9)

Let us now examine the practical application of this Qur'anic teaching. After this who can say that Islam is not a religion of peace, harmony, reconciliation and justice.

'It is narrated that Muhayyasa, Allah be pleased with him, a Companion of the Holy Prophet^(sa) was killed as a martyr in Khyber. His beneficiaries asked the Holy Prophet^(sa) for the capital punishment. The Holy Prophet^(sa) asked: Can you swear and determine his killer? They said: O Prophet of God, we were not there so how can we swear? He replied: There can be no capital punishment without proof. There is only one possibility that the Jews of Khyber whom you suspect should according to the law swear fifty times that they know not who is the killer. The beneficiaries of Muhayyasa, Allah be pleased

with him, said: Who can trust these Jews, they will take false oaths. The Holy Prophet^(sa) replied: Then beyond this no cross-examination is permitted because in the sight of the law, there can be no preference. After this the Holy Prophet^(sa) paid blood money to the beneficiaries of Muhayyasa.'

(*Tajrid Al-Bukhari*, Chapter *Faslil Jihad*, Part 2 published by Ferozsons Lahore)

From these verses it should have become clear that according to the teachings of Islam there can be no compulsion in matters of faith. God Almighty has left the choice of which belief to accept to be determined by the conscience of each person. In fact, the example I gave earlier of the slave, even in his case he was not forced to accept Islam. The Holy Qur'an mentions this freedom of conscience in various verses and it is not possible to mention all of them here.

In brief, after this clear and unambiguous teaching, the question arises that if the Holy Prophet^(sa) or his Companions did not hold the sword in one hand and the Qur'an in the other nor destroyed the peace of the world, what are these holy wars and what is this thing called Jihad which is on everyone's lips and for which every Muslim is being blamed for causing mayhem in the world? The amazing thing is that it is believed that these wars started during the time of the Holy Prophet^(sa). We would have to fulfil the requirements of absolute justice and examine the situation of that age because without bringing that age to the fore, it would be impossible to do justice. In this connection, I set out briefly the words of the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community who says:

Our Prophet^(sa) endured pain in Makkah and even after this at the hands of the disbelievers and in particular just to picture in our minds how the thirteen years in Makkah were spent under such persecution and cruelty of all kinds that it makes us weep. But he did not raise a sword nor replied to their harsh words with harshness – till many Companions and his dear friends had been murdered most cruelly; and, were made to suffer all kinds of ordeals; and, sometimes were poisoned; and, many a plots were hatched of assassinating him in which the opponents remained unsuccessful. When

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And despite the permission granted to engage in a defensive battle against these pursuers and cruel persecutors, the consistent teaching of God Almighty was not to exceed the limits

the time of God's reckoning approached, it so happened that all the leaders and highly placed persons in Makkah unanimously agreed that come what may, the Holy Prophet^(sa) had to be killed. At that time, God Who is the Guardian and Protector of His beloved and honest and truthful ones, informed the Holy Prophet^(sa) that apart from evil there was nothing left in this town and its people were hell-bent on murder and that he should leave at once. Then, under divine command, he migrated towards Madinah but even there his enemies did not leave him and chased him in pursuit and in any case wanted to destroy Islam. When their mischief had gone beyond recall and the murder of many innocent ones made their killers worthy of punishment, at that time was the permission granted in the interest of defence and self-preservation. Moreover, many of those innocent ones who had been killed in mischief and otherwise than in open combat and their properties had been seized had deserved that their opponents should be dealt in this manner. But at the time of the victory of Makkah, our Prophet^(sa) forgave all of them. Therefore, this thought that the Holy Prophet^(sa) and his Companions engaged in any war to spread the faith or to compel anyone to become a Muslim is a terrible error and cruelty.

(Masih Hindustan Mein pp.7-8: Tafseer Hadrat Masih Maud Vol. 3: pp.316-317)

And despite the permission granted to engage in a defensive battle against these pursuers and cruel persecutors, the consistent teaching of God Almighty was not to exceed the limits as it is stated:

And fight them until there is no persecution, and religion is freely professed for Allah. But if they desist, then remember that no hostility is allowed except against the aggressors.
(Surah Al-Baqarah Ch.2: v.194)

So, here this commandment of war is for defensive war and to end evil and that is why it is stated that when they desist, then you are not to engage in battle with them because your true job is to establish peace. So even in the permission for war, we have been given a beautiful principle of defence and making peace.

Wars and principles and regulations

When the Holy Prophet^(sa) engaged in a battle, he used to firmly order that:

- *No woman be killed;*
- *No children be killed;*
- *The old not be impeded;*
- *Nothing be said to the refugees, monks or hermits;*
- *No person be set on fire;*
- *No animal be killed;*
- *No tree be cut down;*
- *Unlike your enemy, no person's nose or ear be cut off.*

Then having been victorious, he used to proclaim:

- *No injured be killed;*
- *Do not pursue unnecessarily anyone who escapes.*

Then in connection with prisoners of war, he used to ask for their kind treatment.

'Thus the prisoners taken after the Battle of Badr themselves admitted that: By God! The Muslims walked on foot while we were made to ride, they remained hungry themselves whilst they fed us, they remained thirsty while they gave us water.'

(Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi, Abu Daud)

Those who call Islam a belligerent, trigger happy and extremist religion should think whether a belligerent religion can give this kind of teaching. Do not toss the action of a few people and organisations into the lap of Islam and call it Islam. Today, in this age when man considers himself highly advanced and under-standing should ask himself whether these high values manifest themselves when bombs rain down from the skies, when missiles are fired on cities and dwellings. How much blood is shed of innocent lives in this indiscriminate bombardment which falls here and kills one here and another one there? In areas where there is anarchy, each day there are funerals of the old, women and children. Such news is not hidden from our eyes.

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(ABOVE) Ahmadiyya Muslim Mosque, Mangoase, Ghana and
(BELOW) Baitul Futuh Mosque,
Morden, London.

'The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is pressed into the erection of mosques in all corners of the world and just as those with those mosques, this mosque of the Ahmadiyya Community, is a symbol of peace'.

(Hadrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad speaking at the reception held on the opening of Baitul Futuh Mosque attended by members of the House of Commons and Lords, Mayors, Ambassadors, High Commissioners, Councillors and representatives of different churches and faiths)

In conclusion, I end my subject of Islam's beautiful teaching and its promotion of peace and its teaching which united a diverse mankind into a single brotherhood with a quotation from a Christian historian, Georgie Zeidan:

'A primary reason for the rapid progress in Muslim education is that the Caliphs of Islam greatly valued the scholars of all faiths and all people and always enriched them with awards of gifts and bounties. They had no concern with their religion or their nationality or their caste or creed. Amongst them were Christians, Jews, Sabians, magicians, sooth-sayers and in fact people from every group. The Caliphs dealt with them with extreme reverence, respect and esteem. The non-Muslims had the same rights and freedoms that the Muslim leaders and governors enjoyed.'

(Tarikh Al Tamaddan Al-Islami Vol.3, p.194)

Now if after this anyone says that Islam is not a religion of peace, it would be a grave injustice.

I hope that in view of the shortage of time whatever I have said would have shown you some aspects of Islamic teaching of peace.

I am grateful to you for listening to my address with attention and respect.

Thank you, once again.

For further information, please contact:

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